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ABSTRACT

The advantages of analyzing the Yoruba prefix "oni-" as two morphemes, "o-" and "ni-" are discussed, and it is shown why it is better to analyze it as an inseparable, single morpheme rather than two separate morphemes. "Oni-" is the only class-maintaining prefix in Yoruba, and is the only prefix attached to a noun to form another noun. Evidence is shown to support the explanation of "oni-" as a single morpheme. Many examples exist in Yoruba to show that there are nouns that have the structure "oni + x" but the "ni + x" counterparts either do not exist or sound awkward. Contains 15 references. (LB)

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Prefix oní- in Yorùbá

Antonia Y. Fọlárin

1. Introduction

In Fọlárin (1987), I pointed out that the prefix oní- is the only class-maintaining prefix in Yoruba. For example, it is the only prefix attached to a noun to form another noun. It can be prefixed to either a derived or a non-derived noun and the resulting meaning of the nouns derived with oní- prefixation is the "owner of ....." or "possessor of .....". In some cases, the meaning can refer to a performer of an action or of a particular profession.

Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the prefixation of oní- to derived and non-derived nouns respectively.

(1.) oní- prefixed to derived nouns:

	I Verbs		II derived nouns		III oni-prefixation[1]
a.	jà 'to fight'	-->	ìjà 'fight'	-->	onìjà 'someone who fights or loves to fight'
b.	so 'to produce fruit'	-->	èso 'fruit'	-->	eléso 'owner of fruits'
c.	kú 'to die'	-->	òkú 'dead person'	-->	olókú 'owner of the dead person'
d.	dé 'to crown'	-->	adé 'crown'	-->	aládé 'owner of the crown'

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(2) oní- prefixed to non-derived nouns.

a.	oní prefix 'owner of'	+	aṣọ 'clothes'	-->	alášọ 'owner of clothes'
b.	oní	+	ẹsẹ 'legs'	-->	ẹlẹsẹ 'owner of legs'
c.	oní	+	ewé 'leaves'	-->	eléwé 'owner of leaves'
d.	oní	+	bàtà 'shoes'	-->	onibàtà 'owner of shoes'
e.	oní	+	ọmọ 'child'	-->	ọlọ́mọ 'owner of a child'

Notice, however, that there are other cases where the oní- prefix also functions as a class-changing prefix. For example, the data in (3) illustrate the prefixation of oní- to adverbs[e] to form nouns.

3.	a.	oní	+ jàgídíjàgan 'trouble making'	-->	onijàgídíjàgan 'a trouble maker'
	b.	oní	+ wèrewèrè 'aimlessly'	-->	oniwérewèrè 'someone who does things aimlessly'
	c.	oní	+ bókibòki 'nonsense'	-->	onibókibòki 'someone who does nonsensical things'

Considering the existence of prefix Ọ[ɜ]- and the verb ní "to have", or "to possess" in Yoruba, some Yoruba scholars, e.g., Abraham (1958), Rowlands (1969), Owolabi (1981) and Awobuluyi (1983), assumed that oní- is a compound prefix which consists of two morphemes ọ (prefix) and the verb ní "to have". Others such as Akinlabi (1986) share a similar view with the scholars mentioned above except that they assume that the ọ- of oní- is the second person pronoun singular subject that already exists in Yoruba.

On the other hand, there are other scholars, such as Bamgbose (1965, 1967, and 1984) and Ogunbowale (1970), who assume that oní- is a single morpheme without providing evidence to support this assumption. In this paper, I will discuss the advantages of analyzing oní- as two morpemes o- and ní-. However, I will show that in spite of these advantages, based on facts of Yorubá, it is better to analyze oní- as an inseparable, single morpheme.

2.1 Oní- As Two Separate Morphemes

The question of analyzing oní- as a sequence of o "second person singular pronoun subject" + ní "to have" as suggested in Akinlabi (1986) does not seem plausible because the meanings of nouns derived with oní- prefixation have nothing to do with the notion "second person singular". For example, the nouns derived in (1a) can refer to either the speaker or the hearer. It can also be used to refer to one person (singular) or many people (plural).

A more plausible analysis is one that analyzes oní- as o- (nominalizing prefix) + ní "to have." This type of analysis will, for example, account for the forms in (2a-c) as shown in (4a-c) respectively.

(4)

	I Verb+Noun		II Verb Phrases		III o- Prefix -ation		IV Assimi- iation Process
a.	ní 'to have'	+ aṣọ 'clothes'	--> láṣọ 'to have clothes'	-->	oláṣọ	-->	aláṣọ 'owner of clothes'
b.	ní	+ ẹsẹ̀ 'legs'	--> lẹ́sẹ̀ 'to have legs'	-->	olẹ́sẹ̀	-->	ẹlẹ́sẹ̀ 'owner of legs'
c.	ní	+ ewé 'leaves'	--> léwé 'to have leaves'	-->	oléwé	-->	eléwé 'owner of leaves'

The analysis in (4) assumes, first of all, the derivations of verb phrases in column II, in the

syntactic component. These verb phrases will further serve as inputs to the morphological process of o- prefixation as shown in column III. Finally, if the first vowel of the verb phrase is either e, ẹ, o, or a, the prefix o- undergoes a vowel assimilation rule, which assimilates all the features of the prefix to the first vowel of the verb phrase as shown in column IV.

This analysis has several advantages:

i. It is economical in the sense that there will be no need of postulating an extra prefix since o- already exists in Yoruba as a nominalizing prefix and ni also exists as a verb.

ii. It serves as support to the claim that phrasal forms[5] do serve as inputs to the morphological component of Yoruba.

iii. It also confirms the independent existence of the phrasal verbs, such as in column II, in Yoruba. This fact can be illustrated by comparing the sentences in (5) with the derivations in (4) above.

(5) a. Mo + ni + aṣọ --> mo láṣọ/ mo ni aṣọ
'I' 'have' 'clothes' 'I have clothes'

b. O + ni + ẹsẹ̀ --> O lẹ́sẹ̀/ O ni ẹsẹ̀
'You' 'have' 'legs' 'You have legs'

c. Ó + ni + ewé --> Ó léwé/ O ni ewé
'He' 'have' 'leaves' 'He has leaves'

The examples in (5) show that the items in column II of (4) can exist as independent verb phrases in a sentential frame. Since nominalization of verb phrases through prefixation is a common phenomenon in Yoruba, it does look plausible to analyze oní- as two morphemes.

What this analysis implies, however, is that any noun that contains oní- is derived by prefixing o- to verb phrases that underlyingly consist of the verb ni- 'to have' plus an object noun or an adverb. In the next section, I will provide evidence to show that this is not the case in Yoruba.

2.2 Evidence in Support of oní- as a single morpheme

As pointed out in section 2.1, analyzing oní- as o- + ni implies that any form or derived noun that has the structure oní+X must have the ní+X (i.e., "have X") counterpart as correctly shown in column II of (4). However, examples abound in Yoruba to show that there are nouns that have the structure oní+X but the ní+X counterparts either do not exist or sound awkward. For example:

(6) a. onísòwò (derived from oní+isòwò) *nísòwò
'a trader' 'a trade'

b. oníwàdùwàdù " " oní+wàduwàdu) *níwàdùwàdù
'a restless person' 'to be restless'

c. onísàngó " " oní+sàngó) *nísàngó
'sango worshipper'

d. ológò " " oní + ògò) *lógò
'collection agent' 'debt collecting'

e. onísègùn " " oní+ìsègùn) *nísègùn
'owner of medicine or a doctor' 'medicine'

f. onídùró " " oní+ idúró) *nídùró
'someone who stands as a surety' 'standing as a surety'

g. onígbàdégbà " " oní+igbàdégbà) *nígbàdégbà
'something that happens from time to time' 'from time to time'

h. alárinà " " oní + àrinà) *lárinà
'marriage broker'

i. onísẹ̀nà " " oní + isẹ̀nà) *nísẹ̀nà
'a carpenter' 'carpentry'

j. alágbe " " oní + agbe) *lágbe
'a begger' 'begging'

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If the starred phrasal forms in (6), which are supposed to serve as inputs to the o- prefixation process, are awkward or impossible forms in the language, then the derivation of the forms in (6a-j) from the structure o+ni+X will be highly questionable.

Aside from the question of the non-existence of some ni+ X structures, a comparison of the behavior of prefix o- with that of the o- in oni- shows that the two o's are not from the same source because they manifest different characteristics.

For example, the prefix o- in Yoruba harmonizes with some of the features of the following vowel, while the o in oni- assimilates to all the features of the following vowel. Examples (7) and (8) illustrate these different characteristics of prefix o- and o of oni- respectively.

7. Prefix O-/O

A		B	
ò-ṣere	'actor'	ọ̀-kọ́ṣẹ́	'apprentice'
o-ro	'a mean person'	ọ̀-rẹ́	'friend'
ò-ye	'wisdom'	ọ-lá	'riches'

8.

	I	II V-Deletion	III /n/--> [l]	IV V-Assimilation
a.	oni+ewé -->	onéwé -->	oléwé -->	eléwé 'owner of leaves'
b.	oni+ẹsẹ̀ -->	onẹ́sẹ̀ -->	olẹ́sẹ̀ -->	elẹ́sẹ̀ 'owner of legs'
c.	oni+aṣọ -->	onáṣọ -->	oláṣọ -->	aláṣọ 'owner of clothes'

In (7A) the prefix O- is realized as o-, if the following vowel is e or o, while (7B) shows that the same prefix is realized as ọ-, if the following vowel

is either o, ẹ, or a (also see Folárin 1987). On the other hand, the last column of (8) shows that the o- of oní- in column I becomes completely assimilated to the features of the following vowel. If the o- in (8) is the same as the prefix o- in (7), the expected forms in column IV of (8a, b, and c) will be as represented in (9a, b, and c) below.

(9) a. *olẹ́wẹ́

b. *olẹ́sẹ̀

c. *oláṣọ

The fact that (9a, b, and c) do not occur in Yoruba confirms the assumption that the o- in (8) is different from the prefix o- in (7). This being the case, it is wrong to assume that oní- is made up of two morphemes o- (prefix) and ní 'to have'.

3. Conclusion

In the above discussion, I have argued that oní[4] should be analyzed as a single unit that cannot be segmented into o- (prefix) and the verb ní 'to have'. This assumption is supported by the facts of Yoruba which show that not all the forms with oní + X structure have the ní + X counterparts. In addition, this assumption is further supported by the different characteristics manifested by prefix o- and o- of oní-.

If oní- is made up of o- and ní, one would expect the o-of oní- to behave similarly to prefix o- which already exists in the language. Since the contrary is the case, I am assuming that oní- should be treated as a single morpheme instead of two separate morphemes.

NOTES

1. There are some phonological rules that interact here with oní- prefixation to derive the forms in column III in examples (1) and (2). The derivations of elẹ́so, onijà, aláṣọ, and olọ́mọ below will

illustrate how such phonological rules interact with oní- prefixation.

Stems:	aṣọ 'clothes'	èso 'fruits'	ọmọ 'child'	ijà 'a fight'
Prefixation:	oní+aso	oní+èso	oní+ọmọ	oní+ijà
V-Deletion:	on'aṣọ	on'eso	on'ọmọ	on'ijà
Tone rules:	onáṣọ	onéso	onọ́mọ	onijà
/n/-->[l] :	oláṣọ	oléso	olọ́mọ	---
V-Assimilation:	aláṣọ	eléso	ọlọ́mọ	---
Outputs:	aláṣọ	eléso	ọlọ́mọ	onijà

In the above derivations, a denasalization rule changes /n/ to [l] in the environment of oral vowels apart from /i/, while a vowel assimilation rule assimilates all the features of /o/ to those of the initial vowel of the noun.

2. These adverbs are commonly referred to as ideophones (see Awoyale 1974 and Akinlabi 1985).

3. O- represents a [-High], [-Low], and [+Back] vowel that is not marked for advanced tongue root. As I will illustrate later on, it is realized as o- when the vowel of the following syllable is either /i/, /e/, /o/, or /u/. On the other hand, if the vowel of the following syllable is either /ọ/, /ẹ/, /a/, /i/, or /u/, the prefix will be realized as o-. The vowels /i/ and /u/ do not participate in the harmonic system in Yoruba (see Fọlárìn 1987 for details).

4. The verb phrases here have undergone a denasalization rule.

5. In Fọlárin 1987, I argued that outputs of the syntactic component should be allowed to serve as inputs to the morphological component in Yorùbá, since there are many verb phrases that undergo morphological processes such as prefixation and reduplication.

6. This same assumption is applicable to prefix oni- which is the conterpart of oni- in forms such as:

a. olòṣi 'poor person' derived from oni + òṣi 'poverty'

b. elèṣù 'stumbling block' derived from oni + èṣù 'devil'

See Awobuluyi (1983) and Bamgboṣe (1984) for more examples of words with oni-.

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